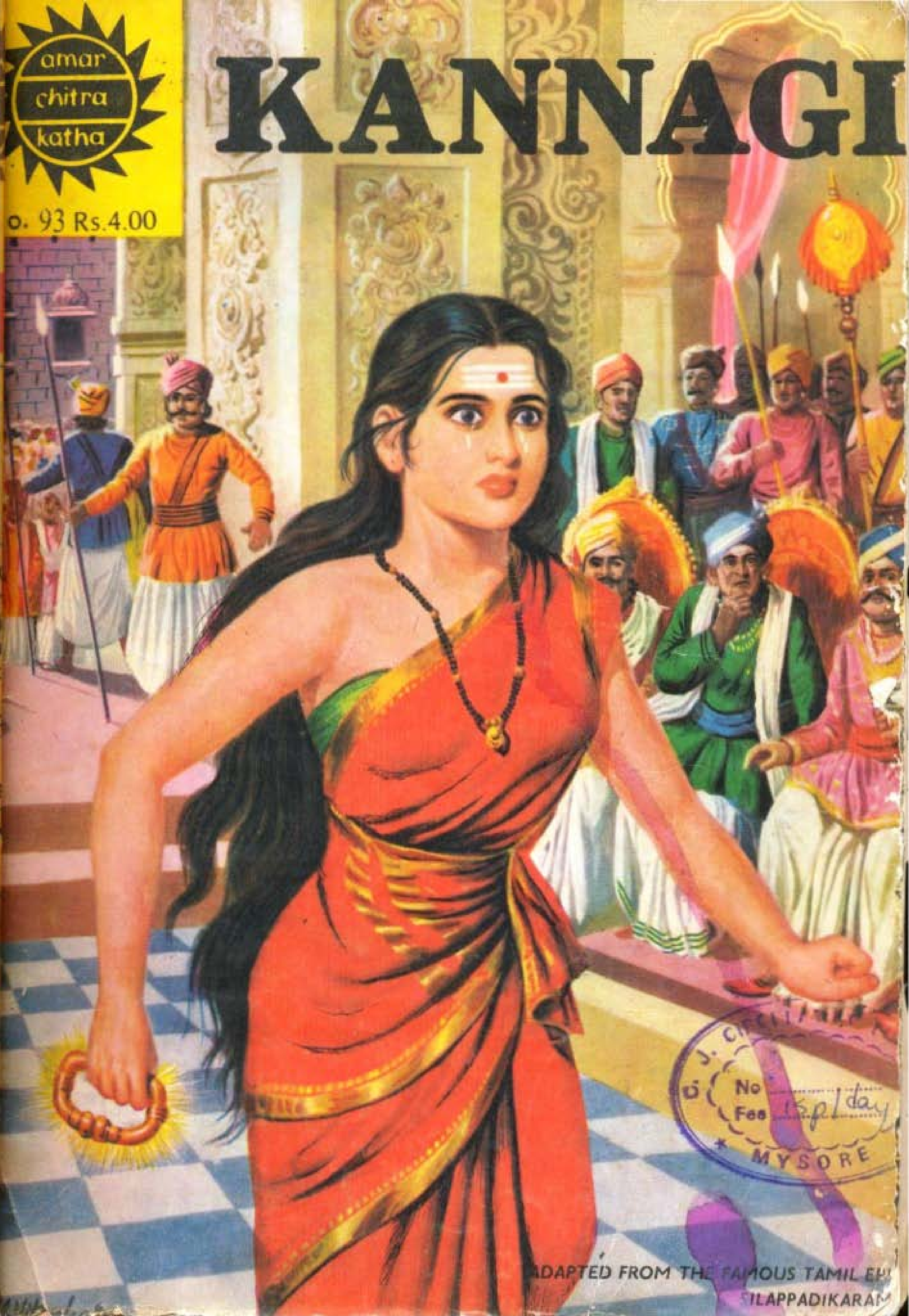
amar chitra katha

No. 93 Rs.4.00

KANNAGI



ADAPTED FROM THE FAMOUS TAMIL EPIC
SILAPPADIKARAM

KANNAGI, a gem of a housewife, a 'paragon of chastity', has been immortalized in the pages of *SILAPPADI-KAARAM*, the famous Tamil epic of Ilango, the Chera prince-turned-ascetic. It is the story of a clash between three anklets: the anklet of the home, the anklet of the stage, and the anklet of the palace.

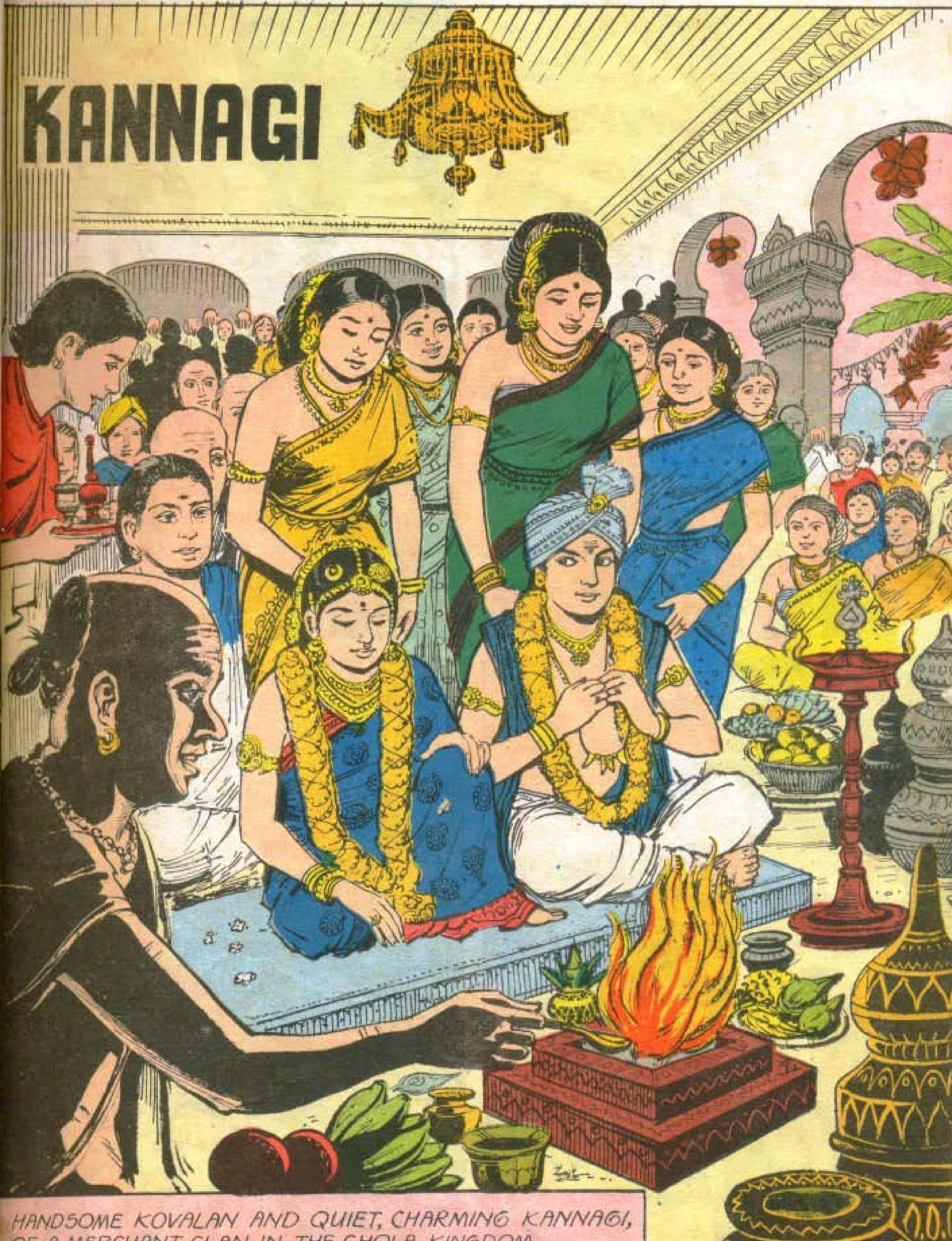
An ill-fated housewife, KANNAGI loses her husband, KOVALAN, to the art of a dancer, MADHAVI, and finds him again only to lose him to the blind law of a king. Her story is set in the three ancient cities of South India—POOMPUHAR the Chola capital where she grew up; MADURAI the Pandya capital where she fell; and VANJI the Chera capital which placed her on a pedestal.

The epic is a rich record of a great civilisation, vivid with descriptions of edifices shrines, docks, market-places, squares, of laws and rituals, of "Natya Shastra," (Science of Dance), musicology and musical instruments of the day. Known for its high dramatic content, *SILAPPADIKAARAM* is a shining jewel in Tamil literature.

The memory of Ilango and his immortal classic has recently been perpetuated by the Tamil Nadu Government by erecting, at Kaveripattinam, a magnificent seven-story art gallery, *Silappadikaaram Kalaikoodam*, in ancient Dravidian architectural style. The structure narrates the story in stone carvings.

Published by H.G. Mirchandani for IBH Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 22, Bhulabhai Desai Road, Bombay 400 026 and printed by him at IBH Printers, Marol Naka, Mathuradas Vissanji Road, Andheri (East), Bombay 400 059.

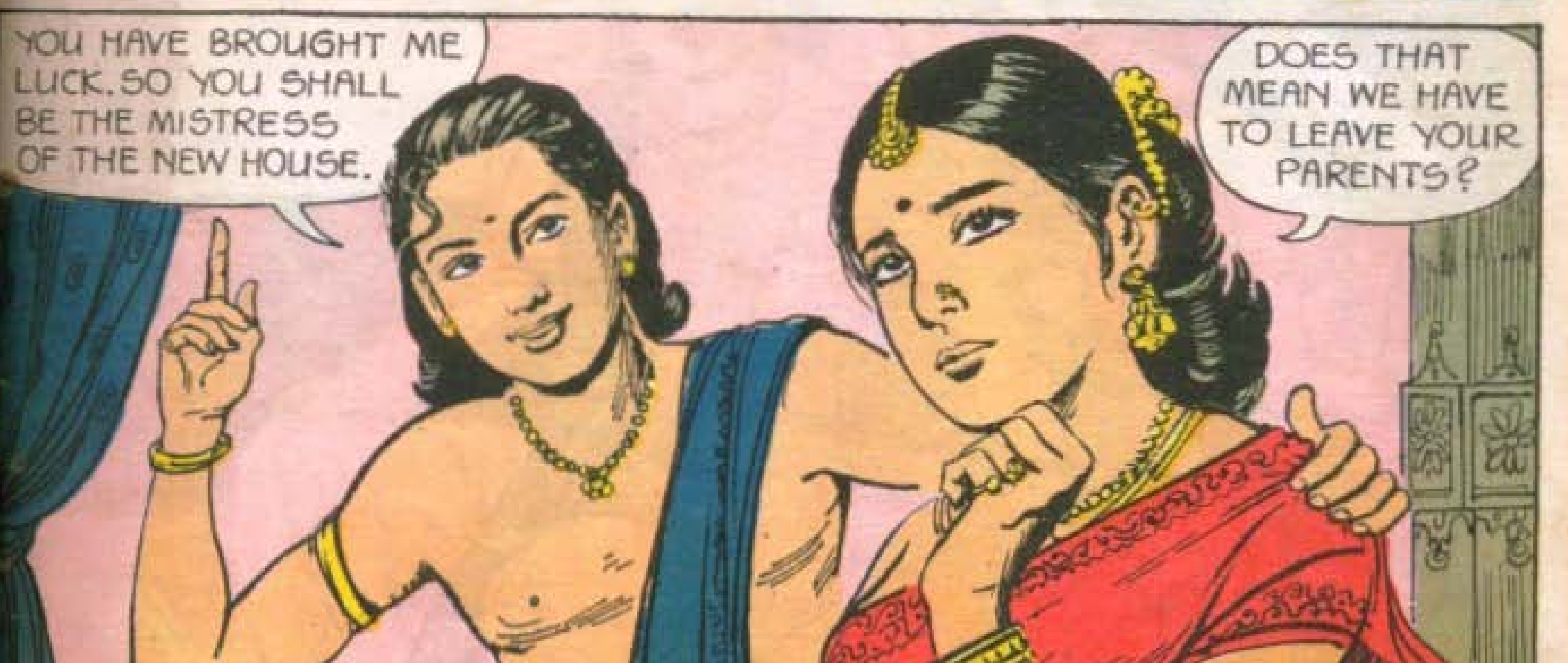
Editor: Anant Pai Script: Lalitha Raghupathi Illustrations: Varnam


KANNAGI
HANDSOME KOVALAN AND QUIET, CHARMING KANNAGI, OF A MERCHANT CLAN IN THE CHOLA KINGDOM, WERE MARRIED WITH POMP AND CEREMONY.


NOW GO AND SEEK THE BLESSINGS OF THE ELDERS.
LET US GO TO MY GRAND-PARENTS FIRST.
AS THE COUPLE CAME OUT-
I WISH YOU JOY AND PROSPERITY.
SHALL I SUGGEST A NAME FOR YOUR FIRST CHILD?
DON'T FORGET TO SPARE SOME TIME FOR YOUR FRIENDS, TOO.
I WOULDN'T BLAME HIM IF HE DID.

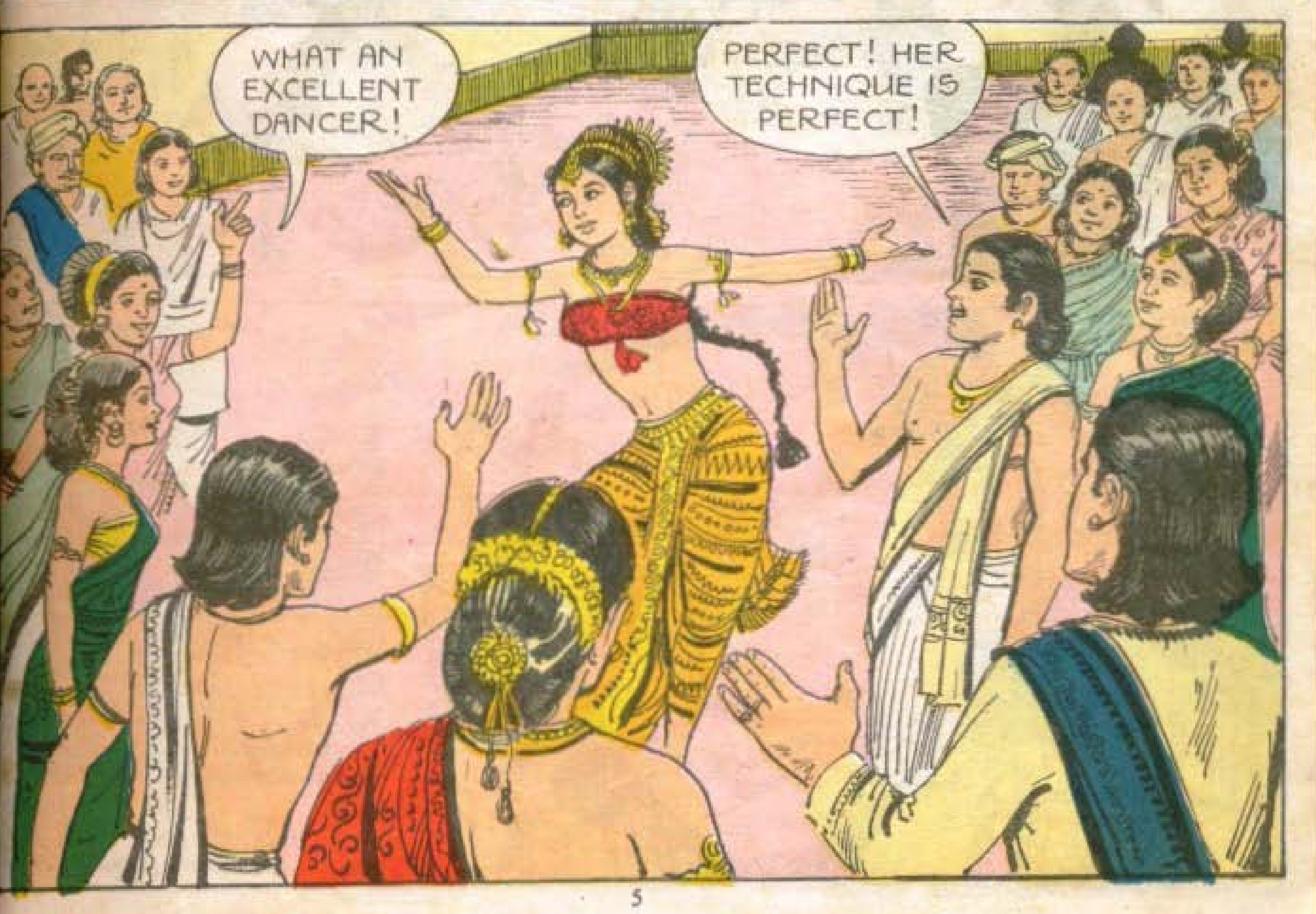

THE NEXT DAY—
KANNAGI, SHALL WE TAKE A WALK BY THE RIVER?
AS YOU WISH, MY LORD.
NO, AS **YOU** WISH. THAT IS WHAT MATTERS.


A MONTH LATER—
KANNAGI, LISTEN. I HAVE JUST CONCLUDED A DEAL WORTH LAKHS OF RUPEES.
NOW WE CAN BUY THAT HOUSE BY THE RIVER!


YOU HAVE BROUGHT ME LUCK. SO YOU SHALL BE THE MISTRESS OF THE NEW HOUSE.
DOES THAT MEAN WE HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR PARENTS?

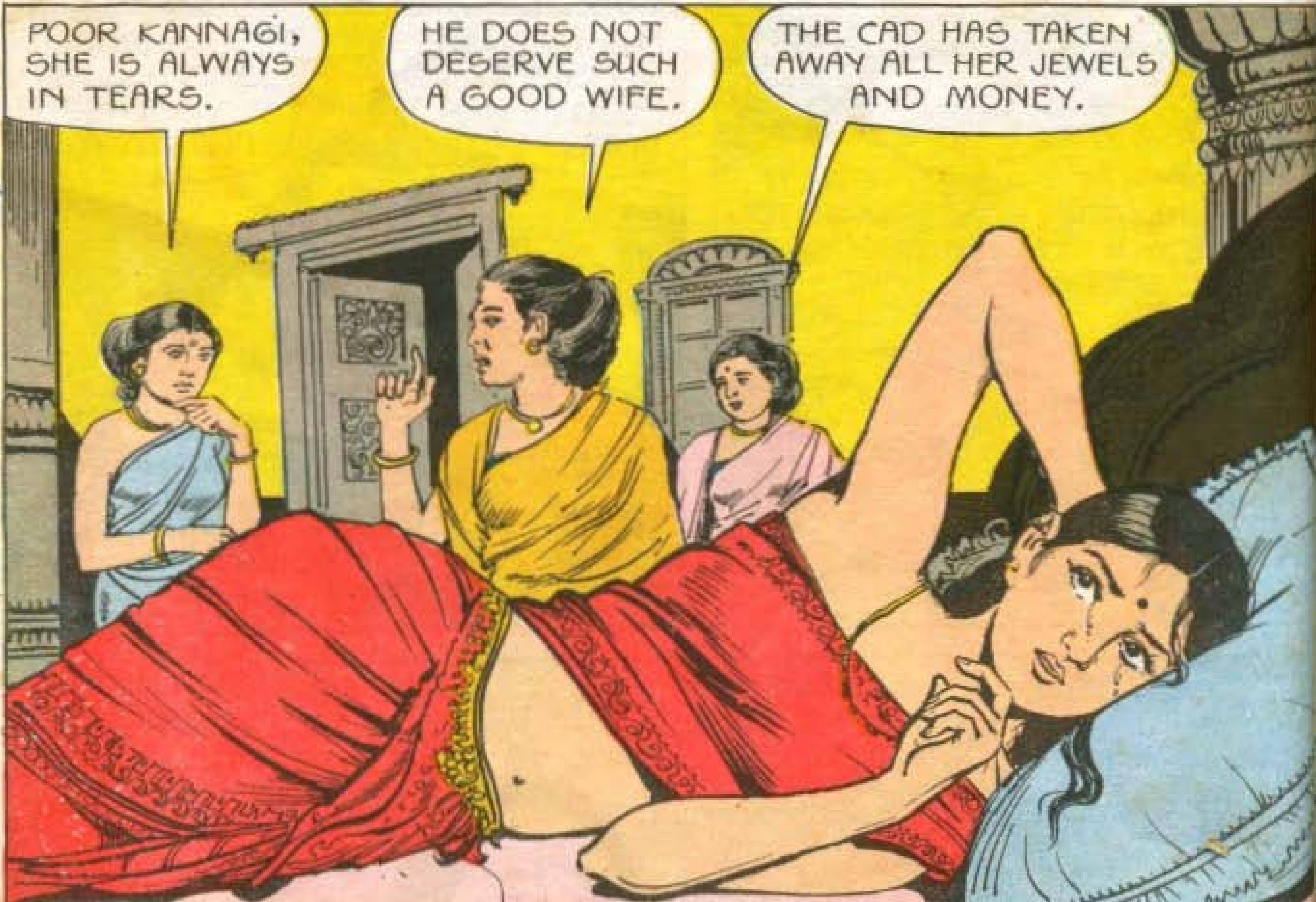

THEY WILL BE GOING AWAY ON A PILGRIMAGE FOR A YEAR. WE WILL LOCK UP THIS HOUSE...
...AND I WILL MAKE THAT HOUSE A HEAVEN FOR YOU.
THREE YEARS LATER, DURING THE SPRING FESTIVAL—
MADHAVI WILL BE DANCING TODAY. THEY SAY SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.
CERTAINLY NOT AS BEAUTIFUL AS MY WIFE.


BUT WHEN KOVALAN SAW MADHAVI PERFORM—
YES. SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.
HE HASN'T TAKEN HIS EYES OFF HER.


WHAT AN EXCELLENT DANCER!
PERFECT! HER TECHNIQUE IS PERFECT!


YOUR PERFORMANCE WAS EXCELLENT. PLEASE ACCEPT THIS MONEY AS A GIFT FROM THE STATE...
...AND MY EMERALD NECKLACE AS A PERSONAL TRIBUTE.
I AM HONOURED, YOUR MAJESTY.
AN EXCITED KOVALAN AND A QUIET KANNAGI WENT HOME.
I CAN'T FORGET HER. I MUST MEET HER ALONE. BUT HOW? WHERE?


THE NEXT DAY—
KOONI, TAKE THIS EMERALD NECKLACE AND SELL IT TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER. ONLY HE WOULD BE WORTHY OF HAVING MADHAVI.
LEAVE IT TO ME TO CHOOSE A HANDSOME RICH MAN.
BUY MADHAVI'S NECKLACE AND BECOME HER LORD.
IS THAT ALL ONE NEED DO TO GET HER? I'LL BUY IT.
YOU MUST PAY 1000 MEASURES OF GOLD COINS, YOUNG MAN.
I'LL PAY THAT AND MORE.
MONTHS LATER—
I CANNOT BEAR EVEN A DAY'S SEPARATION FROM YOU.
I AM OVERWHELMED BY ALL THE LOVE AND WEALTH YOU SHOWER ON ME.


POOR KANNAGI, SHE IS ALWAYS IN TEARS.
HE DOES NOT DESERVE SUCH A GOOD WIFE.
THE CAD HAS TAKEN AWAY ALL HER JEWELS AND MONEY.


YOU MUST EAT SOME-THING. YOU HAVE BEEN STARVING.
FOR WHOM SHOULD I LIVE? KOVALAN NEVER COMES HERE.


SEND HIM AWAY EVEN IF HE DOES. YOU ARE TOO GOOD FOR HIM.



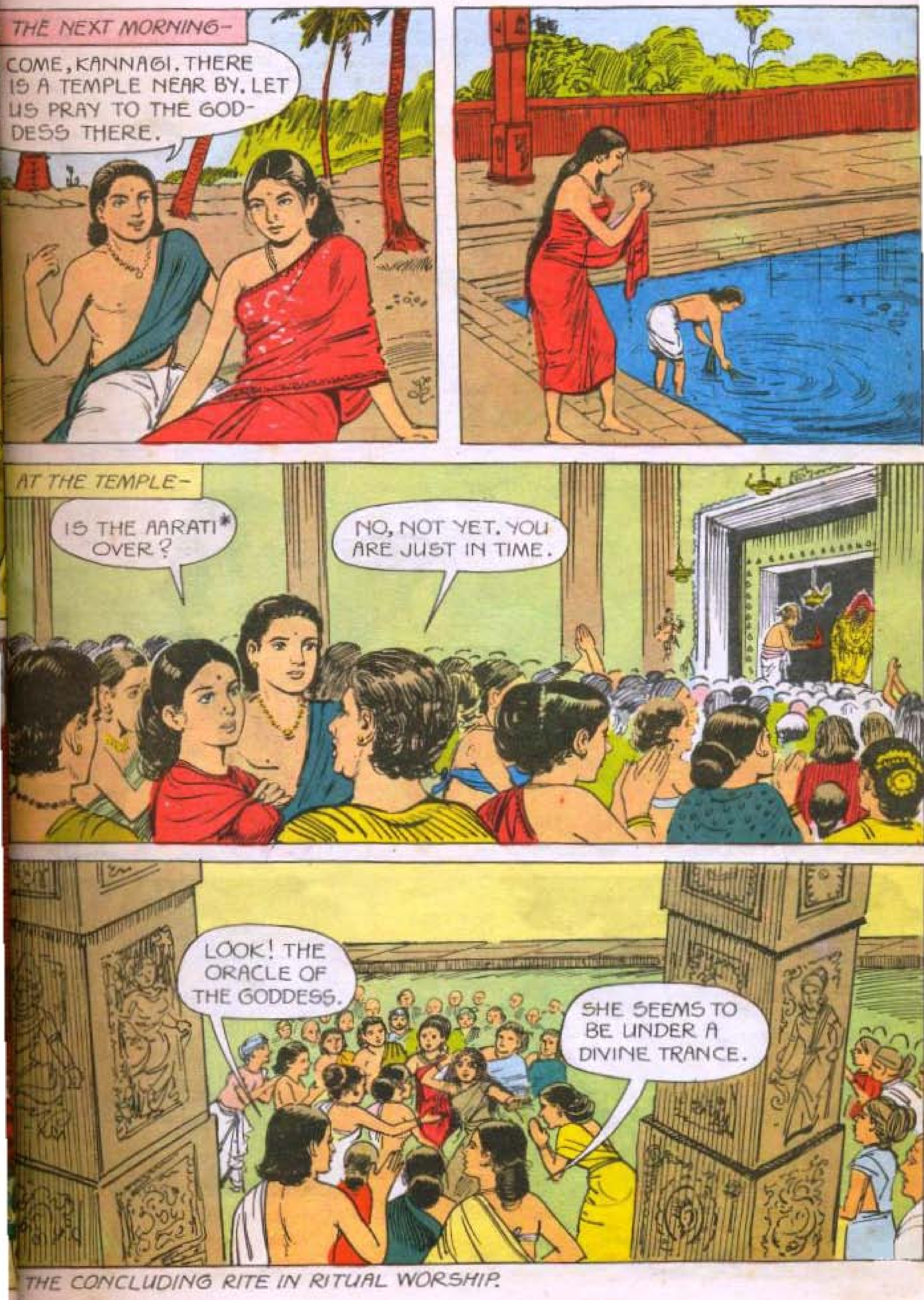
YEARS WENT BY. MADHAVI, IMMERSED IN HER LOVE, NEGLECTED HER PROFESSION.
MY DAUGHTER, AREN'T YOU READY? THE CROWD OUT THERE IS SHOUTING FOR YOU.
I AM IN NO MOOD TO DANCE.
MOOD OR NO MOOD, YOU'LL HAVE TO.
ONE DAY, WHEN MADHAVI WAS SINGING FOR KOVALAN—
I AM HERE AND HER SONG IS FOR A MISSING LOVER? IS SHE YEARNING FOR ANOTHER?
UTTERLY DISILLUSIONED KOVALAN WALKED AWAY FROM HER FOREVER.


SHE IS JUST ANOTHER DANCER. I WAS FOOLISH TO HAVE LOST MY HEART TO HER...TO HAVE SQUANDERED ALL MY MONEY ON HER.
MEANWHILE, OUTSIDE HIS HOUSE, KANNAG
WAS TALKING TO A FRIEND.
I DREAMT THAT HE CAME BACK TO ME. BUT...HE TOOK ME AWAY TO A NEW LAND AND... AND THEN WAS LOST.
DON'T PANIC TRUST IN GODDE PARVATI. SHE WILL PROTECT Y
SUDDENLY—
MISTRESS, THE MASTER IS COMING THIS WAY. HE LOOKS SAD.
KANNAGI RAN INDOORS AND WAITED FOR HER HUSBAND. AS SOON AS HE CAME IN—
KANNAGI, I WAS A FOOL TO HAVE LEFT YOU.

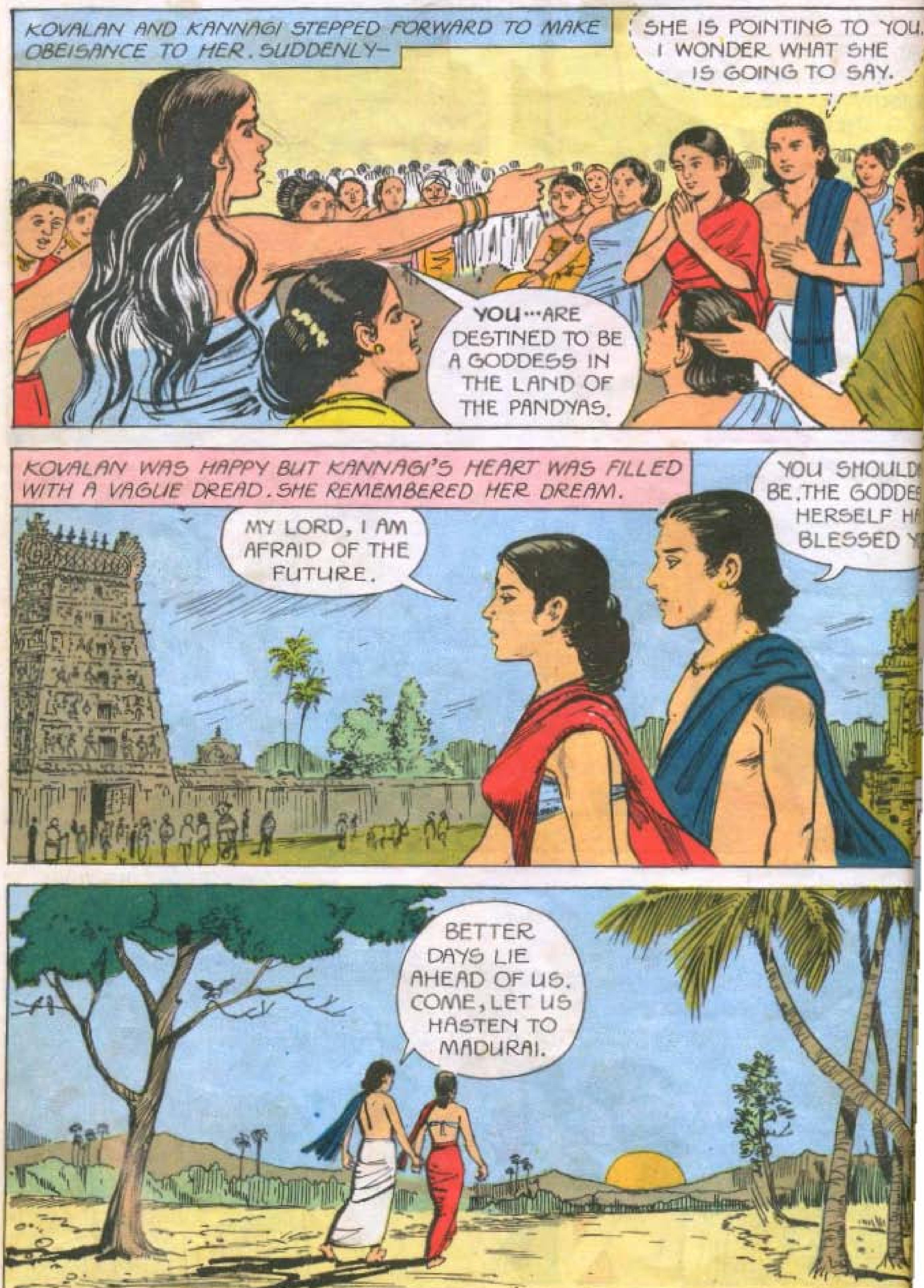

I WILL NEVER NEGLECT YOU AGAIN.
GODDESS PARVATI HAS BEEN KIND TO ME.
LATER–
I'LL NEED SOME CAPITAL TO START MY BUSINESS AGAIN.
MY LORD, I STILL HAVE MY ANKLETS–THE LAST OF MY JEWELS. WE CAN SELL ONE OF THEM.
IT WILL FETCH A BETTER PRICE IN THE MARKETS OF MADURAI. LET US GO THERE.
AS YOU WISH, MY LORD. YOU KNOW BEST.



EARLY, THE NEXT MORNING, THEY SET OUT FOR MADURAI. TOWARDS EVENING-
I CAN'T WALK ANY MORE, MY LORD. LET US REST FOR A WHILE.
HOW MUCH I HAV MADE YOU SUFF I AM SORRY, TERRIBLY SORRY
DON'T SAY THAT. YOU HAVE COME BACK TO ME. I AM HAPPY.
HOW COULD I HAVE EVER FORSAKEN THIS GOOD WOMAN FOR THAT DANCER! AS SOON A I EARN SOME MONEY, I SHALL MAKE AMENDS. SHE SHALL NEVER KNOW PAIN AGAIN.

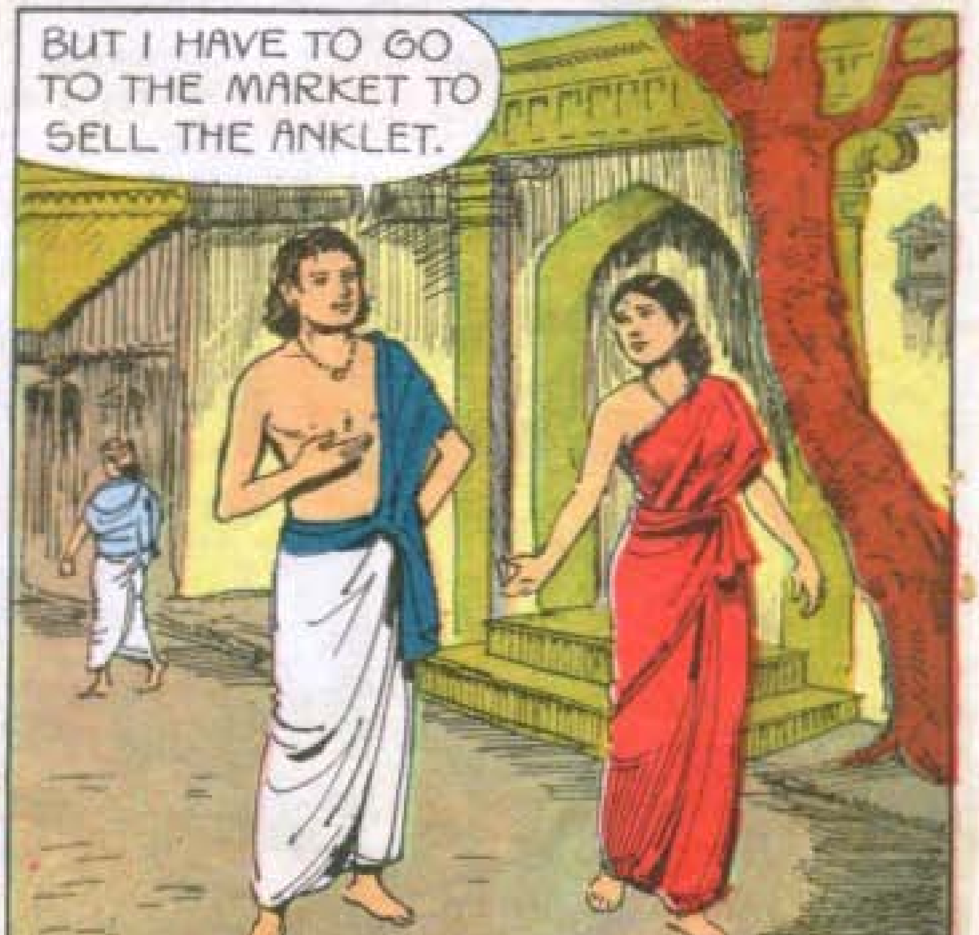


*THE CONCLUDING RITE IN RITUAL WORSHIP.

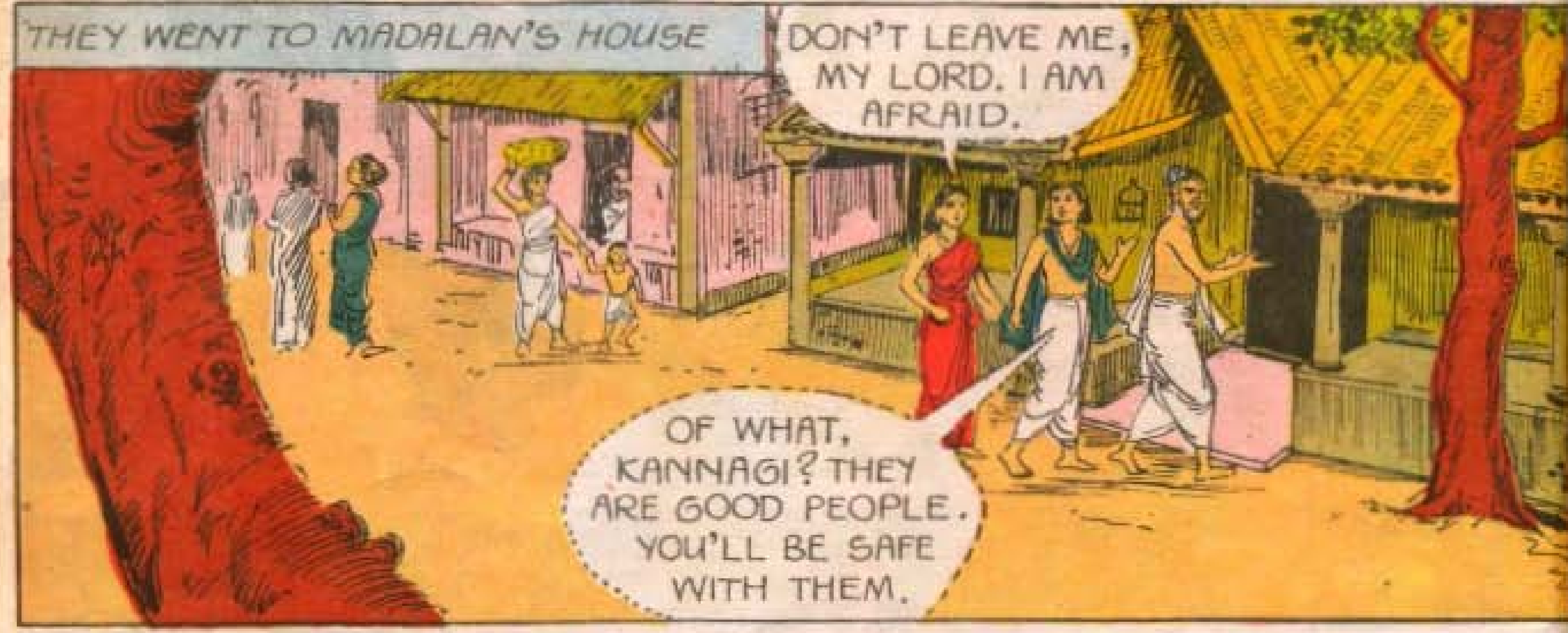

KOVALAN AND KANNAGI STEPPED FORWARD TO MAKE OBEISANCE TO HER. SUDDENLY–
SHE IS POINTING TO YOU, I WONDER WHAT SHE IS GOING TO SAY.
YOU...ARE DESTINED TO BE A GODDESS IN THE LAND OF THE PANDYAS.
KOVALAN WAS HAPPY BUT KANNAGI'S HEART WAS FILLED WITH A VAGUE DREAD. SHE REMEMBERED HER DREAM.
MY LORD, I AM AFRAID OF THE FUTURE.
YOU SHOULD BE. THE GODDE HERSELF HA BLESSED Y
BETTER DAYS LIE AHEAD OF US. COME, LET US HASTEN TO MADURAI.


AT MADURAI–
WHAT A BIG CITY! I FEEL LOST HERE.
YOU ARE SO TIMID. COME, LET ME FIND SOME GOOD PEOPLE IN WHOSE CARE I CAN LEAVE YOU.


PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME AND GO AWAY.


BUT I HAVE TO GO TO THE MARKET TO SELL THE ANKLET.


KOVALAN APPROACHED A KIND-LOOKING COUPLE.
SIR, MY NAME IS KOVALAN. I AM A STRANGER TO THIS CITY. I SEEK YOUR HELP AND HOSPITALITY.
I AM MADALAN. YOU ARE WELCOME TO MAKE MY HUMBLE HOME YOURS.

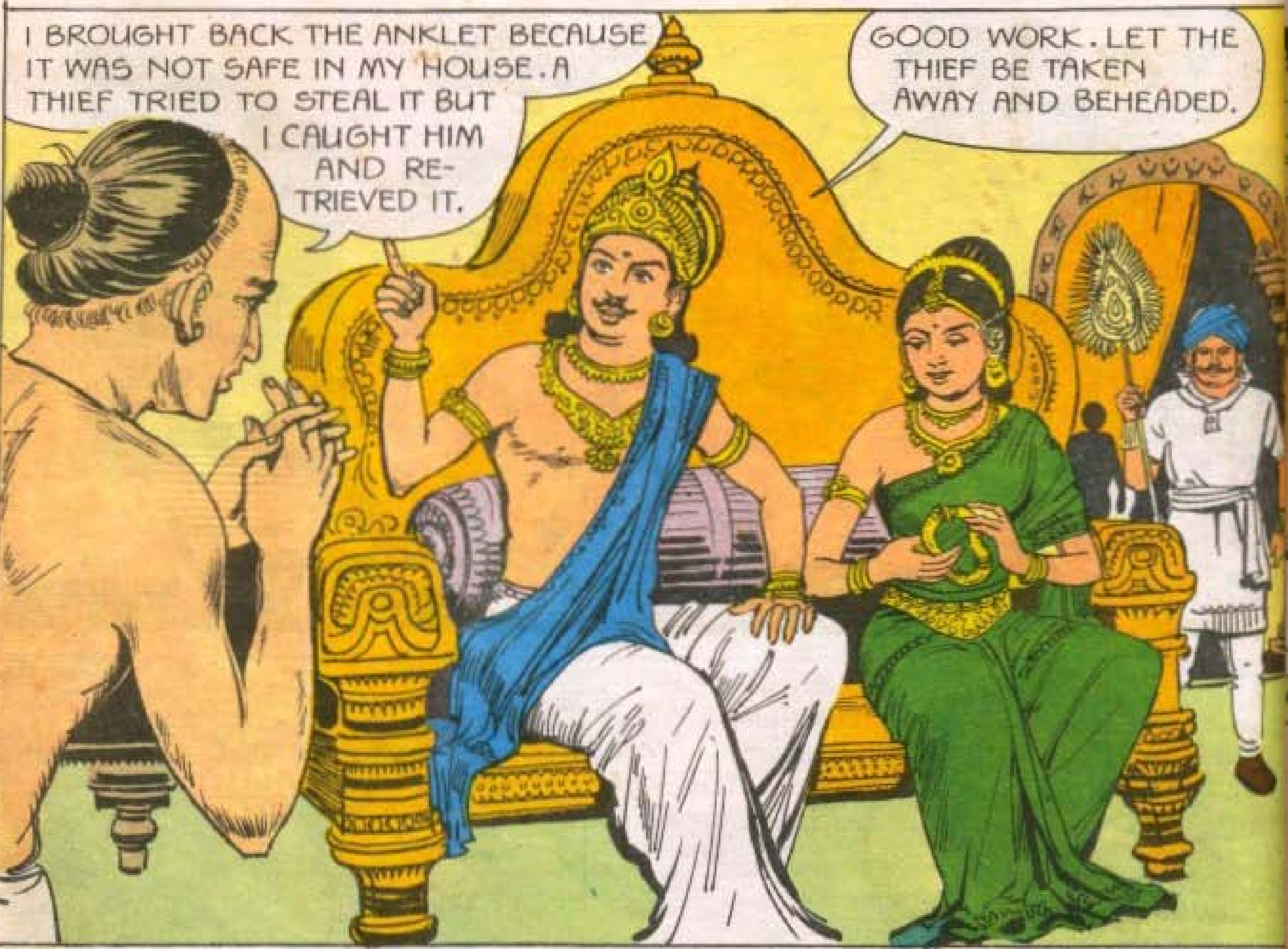

THEY WENT TO MADALAN'S HOUSE
DON'T LEAVE ME, MY LORD. I AM AFRAID.
OF WHAT, KANNAGI? THEY ARE GOOD PEOPLE. YOU'LL BE SAFE WITH THEM.

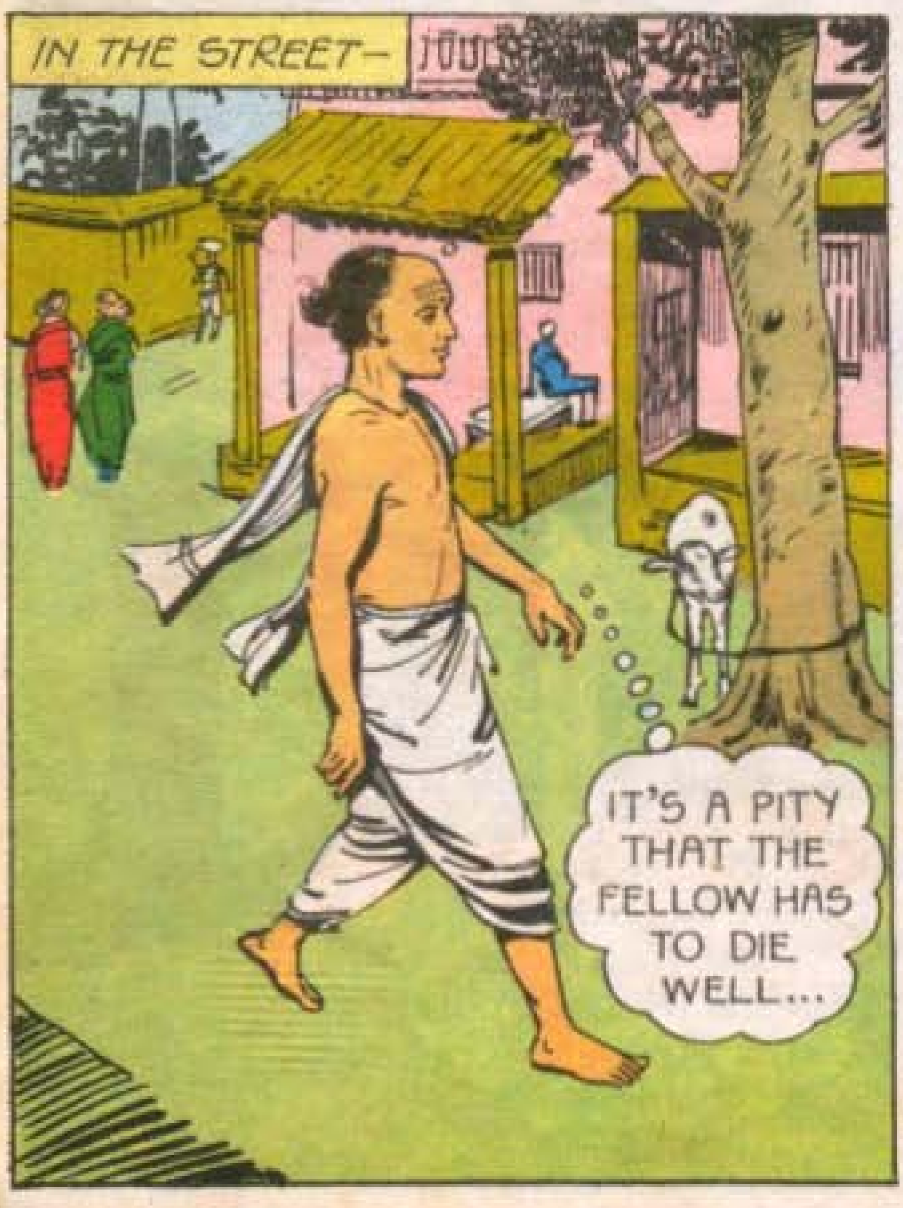

YOU CAN TELL ME ALL ABOUT YOURSELF TOMORROW. GO NOW AND REST.
THANK YOU, SIR. MY WIFE IS TIRED.

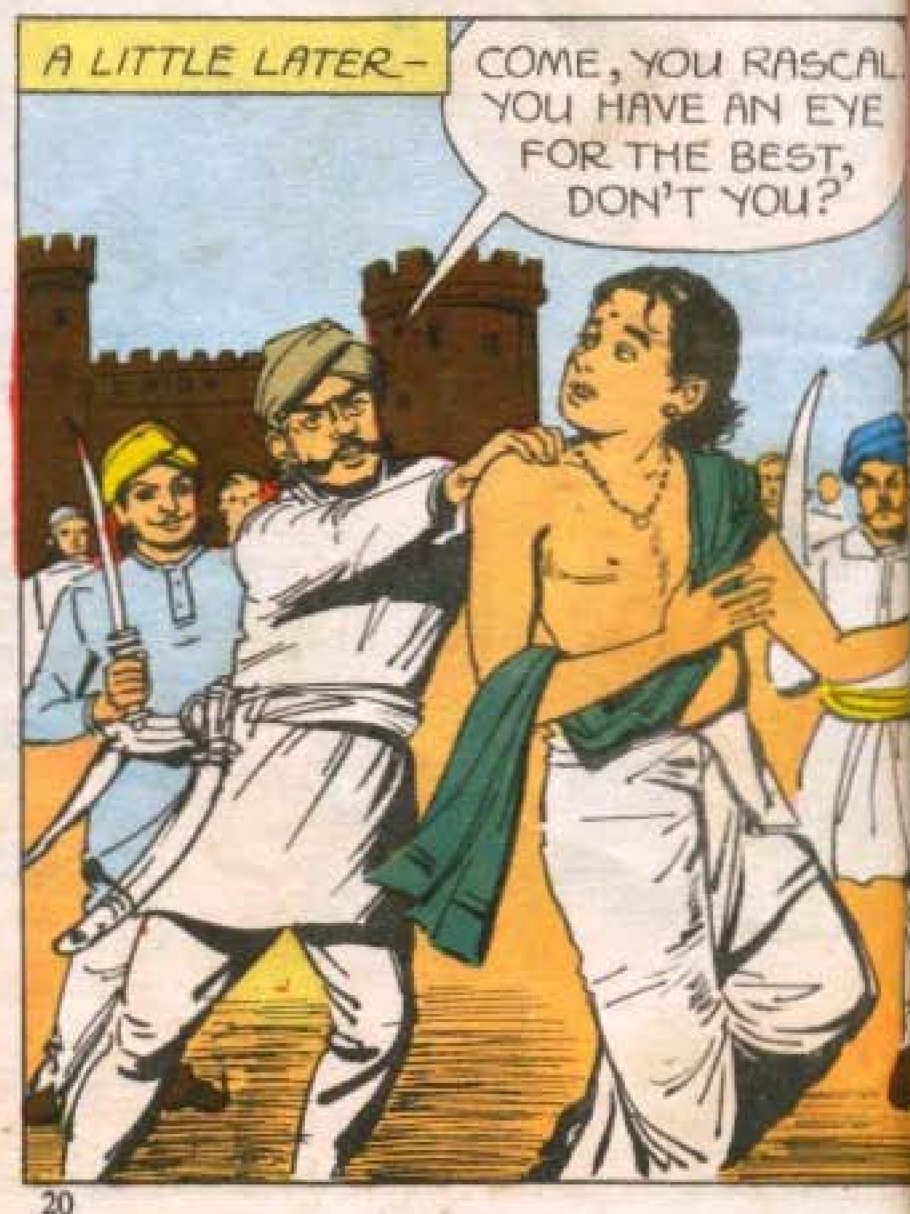

THE NEXT DAY–
SO THAT'S YOUR STORY. GO TO OUR KING. HE WILL HELP YOU.
I HAVE SOME WORK AT THE MARKET, SIR. I'LL FINISH IT AND GO.
I'LL BE BACK SOON, KANNAGI.
I AM NERVOUS, MY LORD; AND FRIGHTENED. MAY GOD BE WITH YOU.
SIR, CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE I CAN FIND A GOLDSMITH?
GO STRAIGHT FOR TWO MILES. THEN TURN TO THE RIGHT AND YOU WILL COME TO THE STREET WHERE THE GOLDSMITHS LIVE AND WORK.
KOVALAN BEGAN WALKING IN THE DIRECTION TOWARDS WHICH THE MAN HAD POINTED.


WHEN HE REACHED THE STREET OF THE GOLDSMITHS–
SIR, DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO BUY THIS ANKLET?
THAT MAN WOULD. HE IS THE QUEEN'S GOLDSMITH.
I WOULD LIKE TO SELL THIS ANKLET.
IT'S BEAUTIFUL.
IT'S EXACTLY LIKE THE QUEEN'S ANKLET ! THE ONE MY WIFE HAS BEE YEARNING FOR.
PLEASE WAIT HERE WHILE I VALUE IT.
I'LL GIVE THE QUEEN'S ANKLET TO MY WIFE...AND RETURN THIS ONE TO THE QUEEN, SAYING THAT THIS STRANGER TRIED TO STEAL IT.


DON'T LET THIS MAN OUT OF YOUR SIGHT.
WHY ARE YOU SO EXCITED, MASTER?
I SUSPECT HIM OF STEALING THE QUEEN'S ANKLET. I AM GOING TO THE KING.
MY LUCKY STAR SHINES TODAY. BUT I'VE SOLD MY SOUL TO THE DEVIL. SO WHAT?


I BROUGHT BACK THE ANKLET BECAUSE IT WAS NOT SAFE IN MY HOUSE. A THIEF TRIED TO STEAL IT BUT I CAUGHT HIM AND RE-TRIEVED IT.
GOOD WORK. LET THE THIEF BE TAKEN AWAY AND BEHEADED.


IN THE STREET–
IT'S A PITY THAT THE FELLOW HAS TO DIE WELL...


A LITTLE LATER–
COME, YOU RASCAL. YOU HAVE AN EYE FOR THE BEST, DON'T YOU?


HE HAS SUCH A NOBLE FACE. WHY DID HE DO IT?
ISN'T HE MADALAN'S GUEST? I MUST GO AND TELL HIM.
THE MAN RUSHED TO MADALAN'S HOUSE –
YOUR GUEST IS DEAD.
NO!
DEAD? WHAT HAPPENED?
HE WAS BEHEADED. THE KING'S ORDERS. HE STOLE THE QUEEN'S ANKLET.
NO. IT CANNOT BE.
POOR KANNAGI. SHE HAS FAINTED.



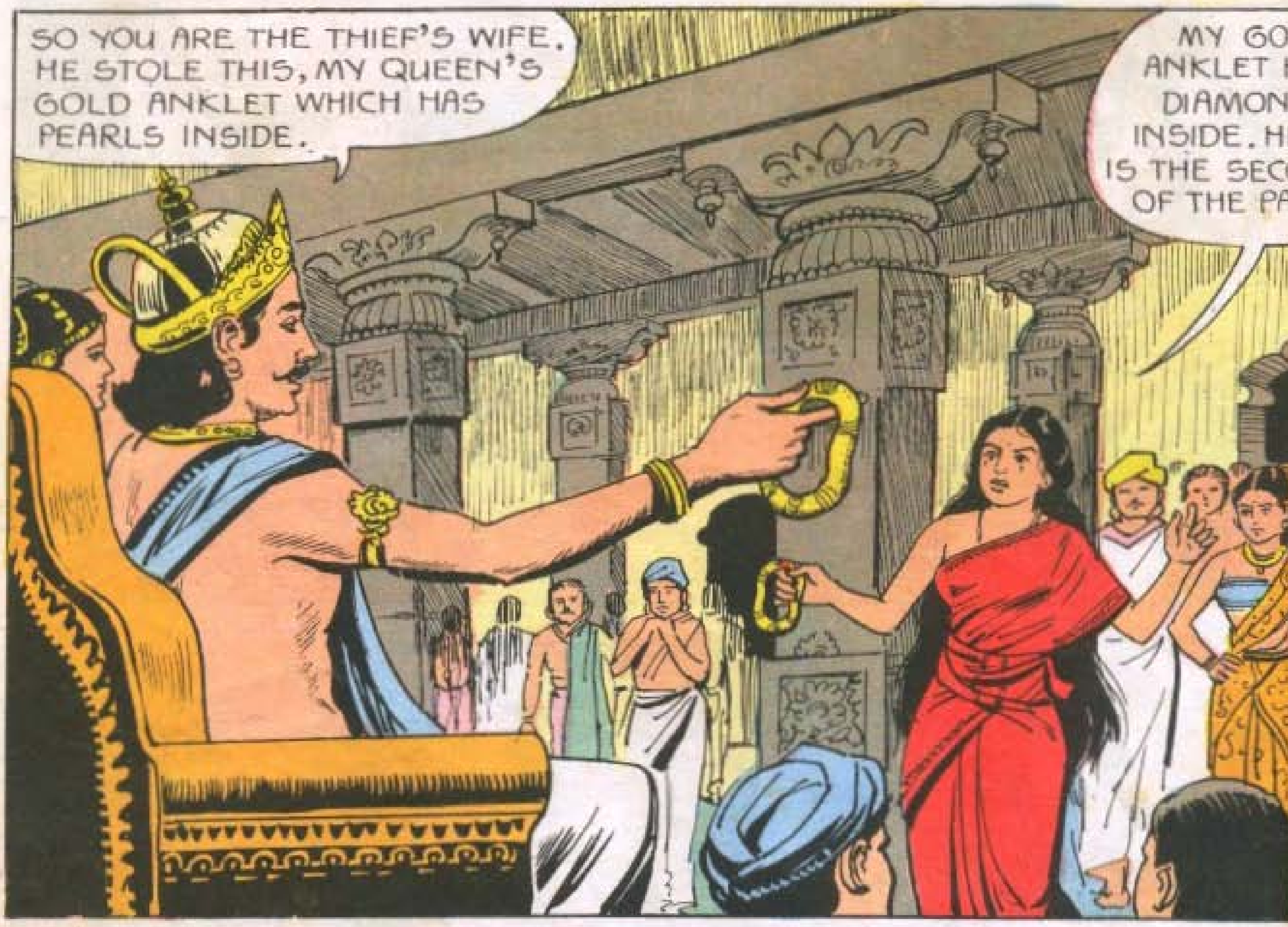
KANNAGI WAS REVIVED BY THE. KIND MADALAN AND HIS WIFE.
MY HUSBAND, A THIEF? IS THE KING MAD?
IF I AM A PURE WOMAN, MY HUSBAND WILL SPEAK TO ME WHEN HE SEES ME.
AT THE MARKET PLACE, KANNAGI SAT DOWN NEAR THE BODY.
SHE HAS WROUGHT A MIRACLE.
LOOK THE SEVERED HEAD HAS JOINED THE BODY!
SPEAK TO M MY LORD!
KOVALAN SPOKE TO HER.
KANNAGI, WHY DO YOU LOOK SO SAD? YOU'LL JOIN ME SOON.
THEN HE DIED IN HER ARMS.

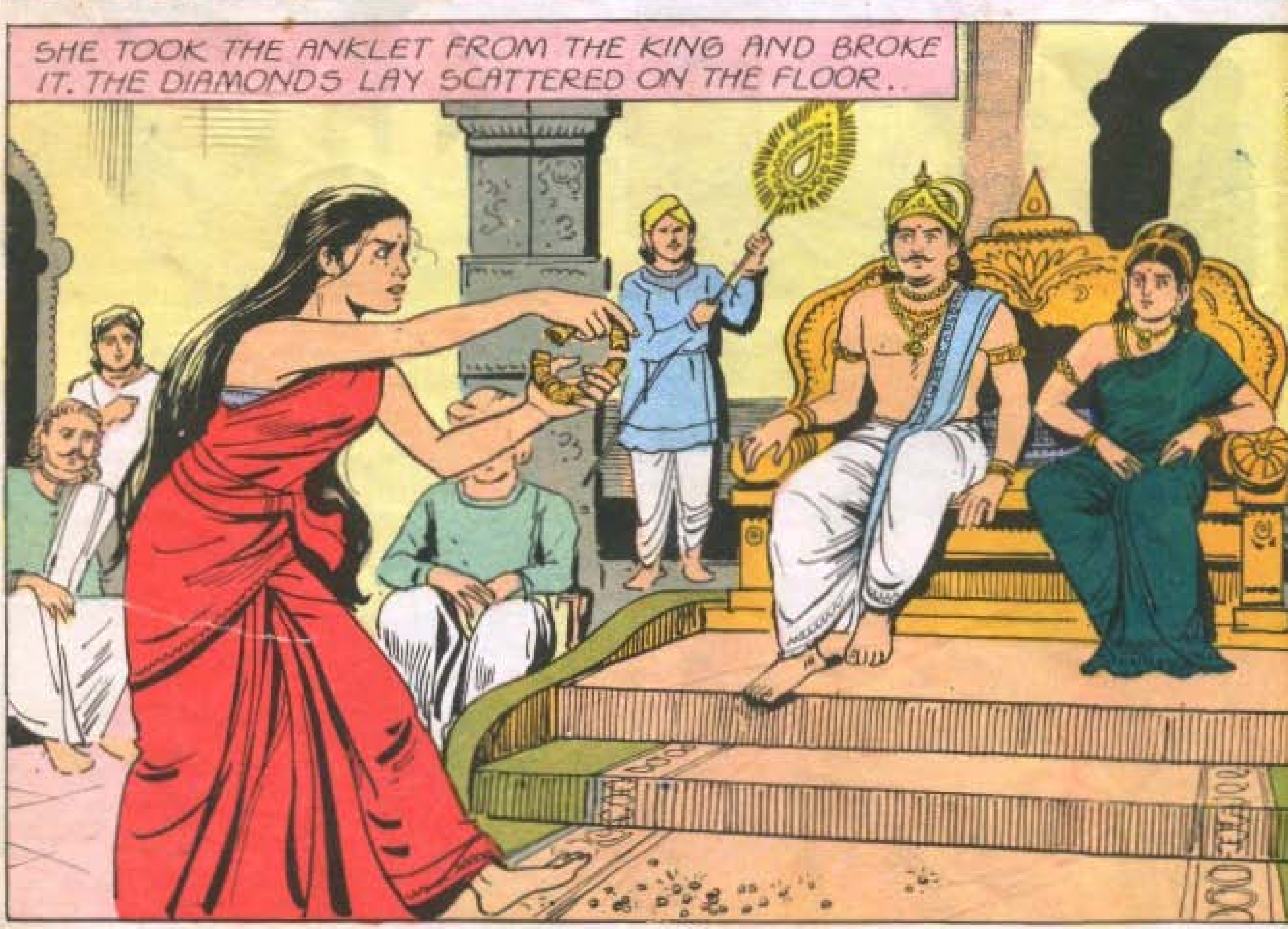

YOUR KING IS A MURDERER. THIS ANKLET WILL PROVE KOVALAN'S INNOCENCE.
THE CROWDS FOLLOWED KANNAGI AS SHE CHARGED TOWARDS THE PALACE.
WHAT A NOBLE WOMAN!
HER HUSBAND COULD NEVER BE A THIEF.
ARE THERE NO WISE MEN OR PURE WOMEN IN THIS REALM? WHY DIDN'T THEY SAVE MY HUSBAND?


AT LAST SHE REACHED THE GATES OF THE PALACE.
GO AND TELL YOUR KING THAT A WOMAN SEEKS JUSTICE. HER HUSBAND HAS BEEN KILLED UNJUSTLY.


AS KANNAGI STRODE FORWARD MENACINGLY-
WE WANT JUSTICE.
CUR KING HAS BLUNDERED.
THE WRATH OF THE GODS WILL BE ON YOU.

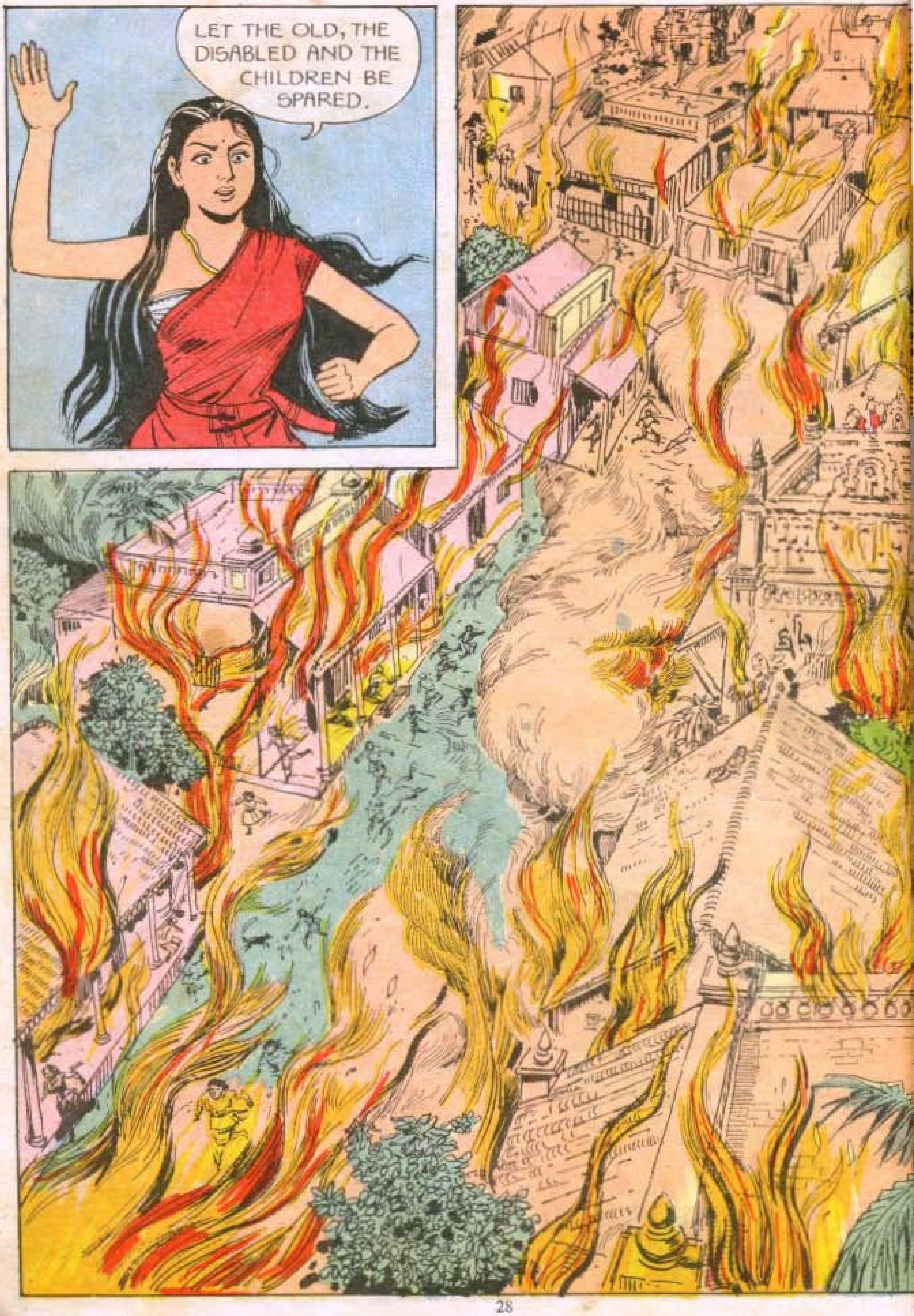

MY LORD, A NOBLE WOMAN IS AT THE GATES. SHE SAYS HER HUSBAND HAS BEEN KILLED UNJUSTLY.
LET HER IN. I'LL SEE THAT JUSTICE IS DONE. WHO IS SHE?
I HAVE COME FROM THE CHOLA KINGDOM, FAMED FOR ITS UNERRING JUSTICE, TO A KINGDOM WHERE JUSTICE SEEMS TO BE UN-KNOWN.
MY INNOCENT HUSBAND TRIED TO SELL AN ANKLET. SOMEONE CALLED HIM A THIEF AND YOU, O UNJUST KING, BEHEADED HIM WITHOUT EVEN A TRIAL!


SO YOU ARE THE THIEF'S WIFE. HE STOLE THIS, MY QUEEN'S GOLD ANKLET WHICH HAS PEARLS INSIDE.
MY GOL
ANKLET HA
DIAMOND
INSIDE. HER
IS THE SECON
OF THE PAIR


SHE TOOK THE ANKLET FROM THE KING AND BROKE IT. THE DIAMONDS LAY SCATTERED ON THE FLOOR.

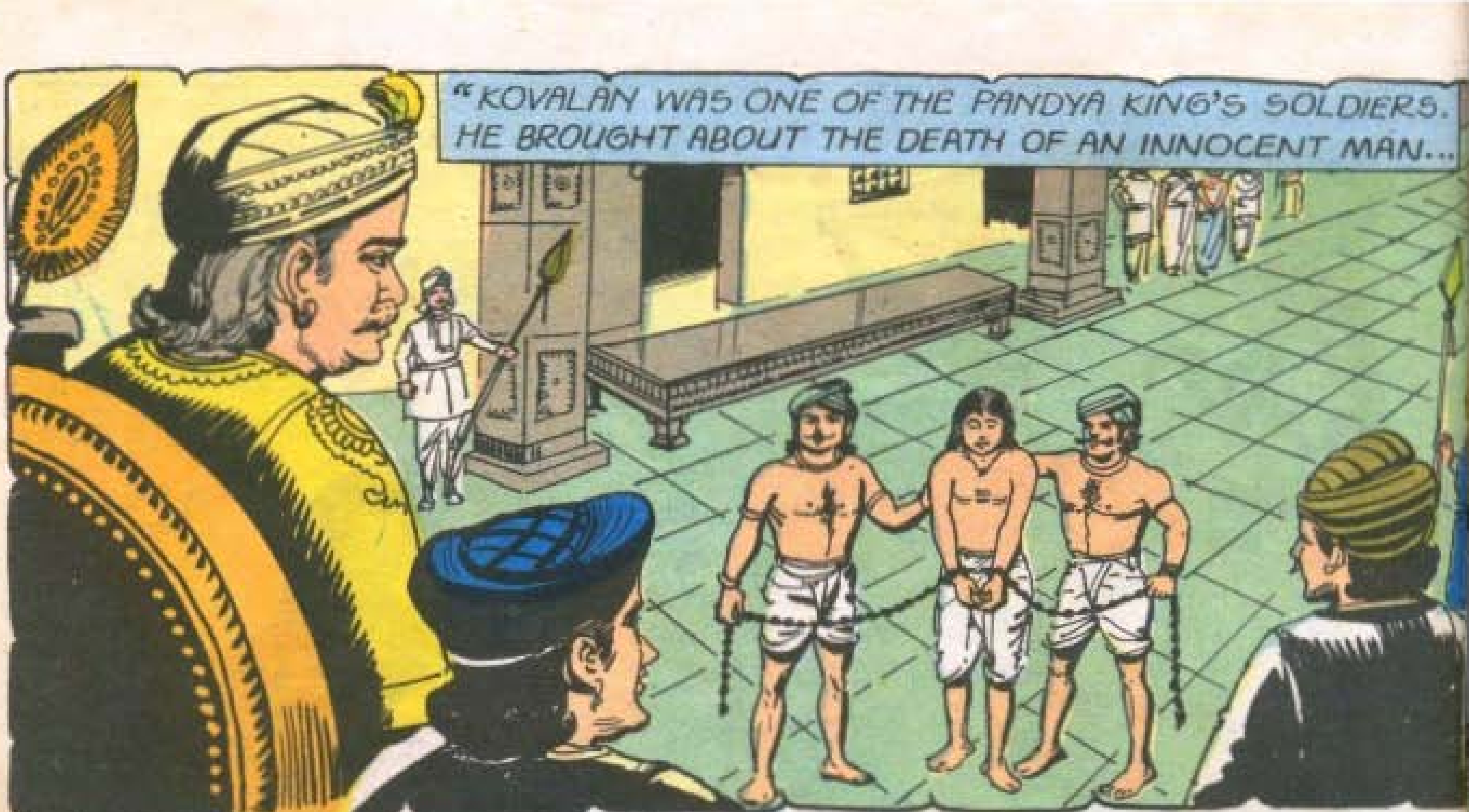


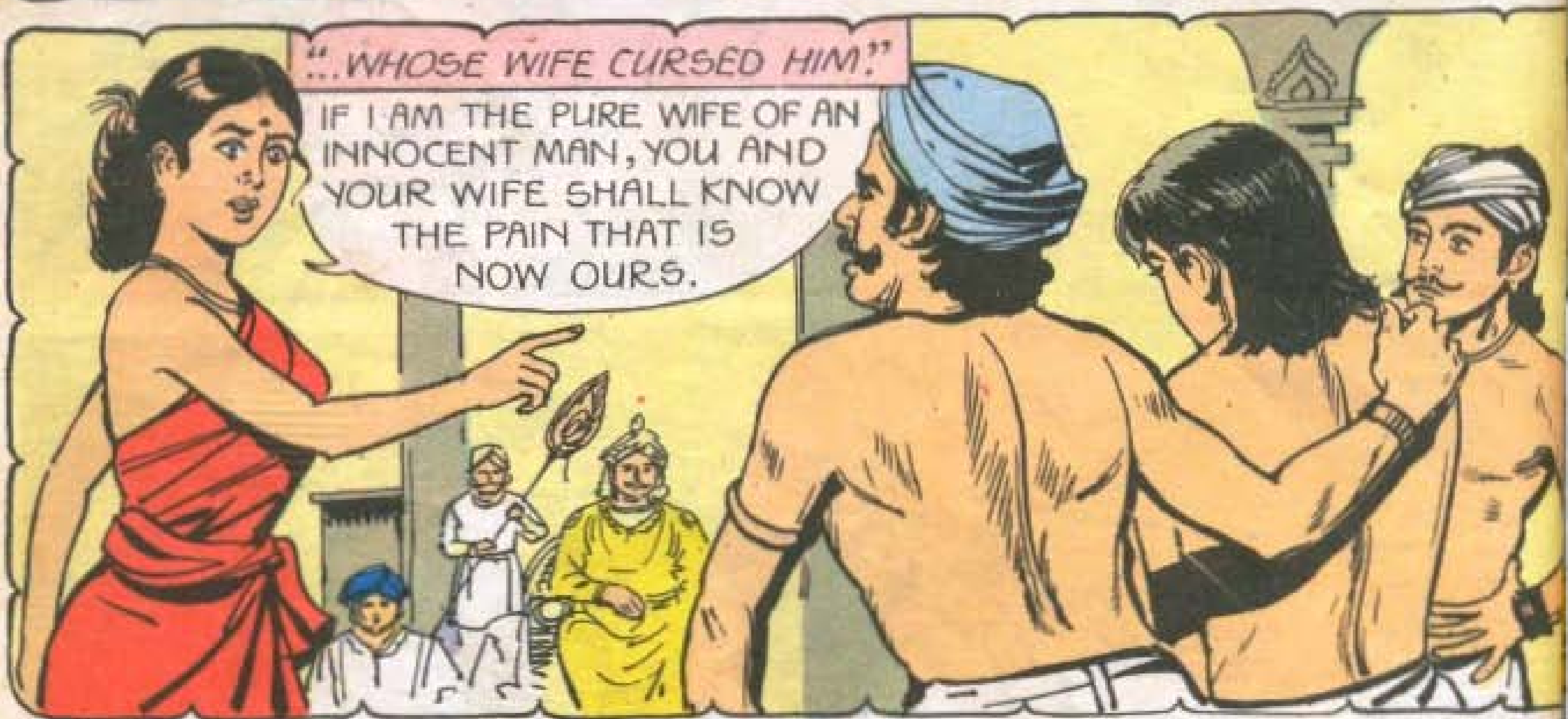
HAT HAVE I DONE ! I HAVE ILLED AN INNOCENT AN. I CAN ATONE NLY BY MY WN EATH.
VERCOME BY HIS SENSE OF UILT, THE KING FELL DEAD.
FOR A CHASTE WOMAN THERE IS NO LIFE AFTER THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND. I WILL FOLLOW HIM.
UT KANNAGI'S ANGER WAS OT APPEASED. SHE REACHED HE PALACE GATES AND–
IF I AM THE CHASTE WIFE OF AN INNOCENT MAN, LET THIS CURSED CITY BURN TO ASHES IN THE FLAMES OF MY WRATH.


LET THE OLD, THE DISABLED AND THE CHILDREN BE SPARED.


THE GODDESS OF MADURAI CAME DOWN.
LISTEN TO ME, O KANNAGI. THE KING WAS NOT AT FAULT.


IT IS YOUR HUSBAND'S SIN IN A PREVIOUS BIRTH THAT HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THIS TRAGEDY.


"KOVALAN WAS ONE OF THE PANDYA KING'S SOLDIERS.
HE BROUGHT ABOUT THE DEATH OF AN INNOCENT MAN...

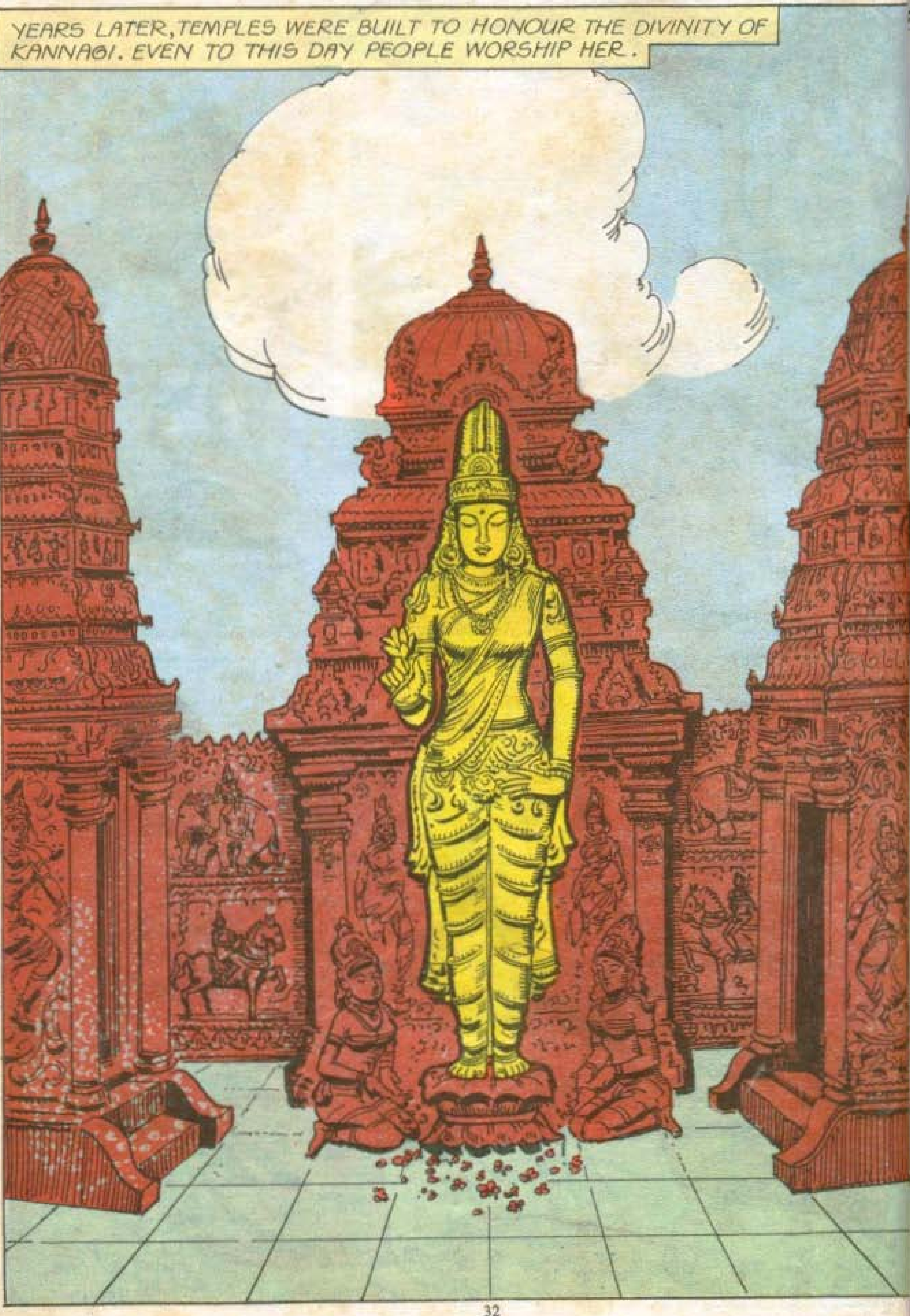

"..WHOSE WIFE CURSED HIM!"
IF I AM THE PURE WIFE OF AN INNOCENT MAN, YOU AND YOUR WIFE SHALL KNOW THE PAIN THAT IS NOW OURS.


KANNAGI UNDERSTOOD.
BLESS US, O GODDESS. RELEASE US FROM THE THROES OF THIS CURSE.


YOU WILL GO TO HEAVEN WITH YOUR HUSBAND. HE WILL COME DOWN AND TAKE YOU. MADURAI WILL BE REBUILT.


AS PROMISED BY THE GODDESS, KOVALAN CAME DOWN IN A WINGED CHARIOT.


KANNAGI, WE ARE NOW FREE OF ALL EARTHLY PAINS AND PLEASURES.


YEARS LATER, TEMPLES WERE BUILT TO HONOUR THE DIVINITY OF KANNAGI. EVEN TO THIS DAY PEOPLE WORSHIP HER.